

Don Heinzman, *Hometown Source*, editorial

Unemployed Minnesotans whose federal emergency unemployment compensation has not been extended are facing a bleak holiday season.

While that federal unemployment compensation ran out Dec. 1, a state program extends benefits for 13 weeks until March.

Of the two million who are losing their federal unemployment benefits in the country, 62,887 have received the limit of state payments in Minnesota and are or were receiving federal benefits.

As of mid-November, 147,000 Minnesotans received state and federal unemployment money.

On the Friday before Thanksgiving the House of Representatives voted down an extension of benefits to February, 2011.

Voting against extending benefits were Republicans: Sixth District Representative Michelle Bachmann, Second District Representative John Kline, Third District Representative Eric Paulsen and Democrat Seventh District Congressman Collin Peterson

Voting in favor of extending the benefits to February, 2011 were Democrats First District Congressman Tim Walz, Fourth District Congresswoman Betty McCollum, Fifth District Congressman Keith Ellison and Eighth District Congressman James Oberstar.

ECM newspapers are published mainly in the second, sixth and eighth congressional districts.

Kline voted against the extension even though the number of unemployment insurance applicants in his district were 18,681, as of October.

Bachmann's Sixth District had 20,057 unemployment applicants in her district as of October. Bachmann cited excessive federal spending and the need to return to fiscal sanity as reasons for her vote.

Congressman James Oberstar voted in favor of the extension, as there are 25,952 unemployment applicants in his district.

One indication of the plight of families in congressional districts is a survey taken in 2008-09 that showed the percent of households unable to buy food: Kline's district, 11.5 percent; Paulsen's district, 9.3 percent; Bachmann's district, 12.9 percent. In that survey taken by Hunger Solutions, one of 10 reported a food hardship.

At the Work Force Center in Monticello in the Sixth District, there has been an uptick in hiring, particularly for job-seekers who have technical skills.

In Kline's Second district, two workforce centers, one in West St. Paul and another in Burnsville, reported that 5,400 people visited the center for all kinds of employment services in November.

While not all are unemployed, some are under employed. Those who qualify for unemployment benefits are those who lose their jobs through no fault or choice of their own. Workers who resign voluntarily or who lose their jobs for poor performance or misconduct do not qualify.

Those receiving unemployment benefits are depending on the state and federal government to help them ride out this severe recession of which they are victims. It behooves the employed to contact their representatives, otherwise votes against extending unemployment benefits will continue.